Greenhouses and Sewage

The Ministry of the Environment is responsible for protecting water at its source ensuring every Ontarian has access to safe drinking water and clean beaches. By stopping contaminants from getting into our lakes, rivers and aquifers, the ministry provides the first line of defense in the protection of our environment and the health of Ontarians.

Getting the required approvals and complying with their conditions ensures everyone is doing their part to minimize or eliminate the potential harmful impacts of sewage to the environment.

What is sewage?

The Ontario Water Resources Act (OWRA) defines sewage as including drainage, storm water, commercial wastes and industrial wastes and such other matter or substance as is specified by the regulations.

Greenhouses commonly generate three types of sewage: storm water; sanitary sewage; and process wastewater.

1. Storm water: rainfall, snowmelt and roof and surface runoff.
2. Sanitary Sewage: wastewater generated from showers, toilets, and kitchens located on the greenhouse operation site.
3. Process Wastewater: water with added nutrients; water that has been used for irrigation and washing of crops; recycled water; and water transported through floor drains located within the greenhouse operation, including water that mixes with storm water.

Under the act, a sewage works is defined as any works for the collection, transmission, treatment and disposal of sewage or any part of such works. Since storm water is defined as sewage in the OWRA, storm water management facilities are also sewage works under this definition.

Regulatory Exemptions

Section 53 of the Ontario Water Resources Act requires an approval for sewage works with some exceptions.

Section 53 (6) (d) of the Act lists an exemption from approvals where the main purpose is to drain land for agricultural activity. This exemption does not apply to greenhouses. Although greenhouses are an agricultural activity, the main purpose of sewage works serving greenhouses is not to drain land.

An exemption is available for storm water management facilities in section 3 of Ontario Regulation 525/98, made under the Act. However, this exemption is only available if the storm water management facility is designed to service one lot or parcel of land that is not industrial, and discharges to an engineered storm sewer that is not a combined sewer.

Untreated process wastewater, storm water and sanitary waste water can negatively impact the environment. To help control and minimize those impacts, discharges from greenhouses require approval from the ministry. Usually, there are only two relevant exceptions to this requirement:

- discharging process wastewater or sanitary waste water directly to a sanitary sewer; or
- discharging storm water directly to an engineered single purpose storm sewer.

Generally, any other greenhouse process wastewater, sanitary sewage or storm water discharges will require an Environmental Compliance Approval. The Environmental Compliance Approval replaces the previous Certificate of Approval as of October 31, 2011.

This fact sheet provides greenhouse operators with important information on how to obtain approval from the ministry.

Do I need an Environmental Compliance Approval for my greenhouse operation?

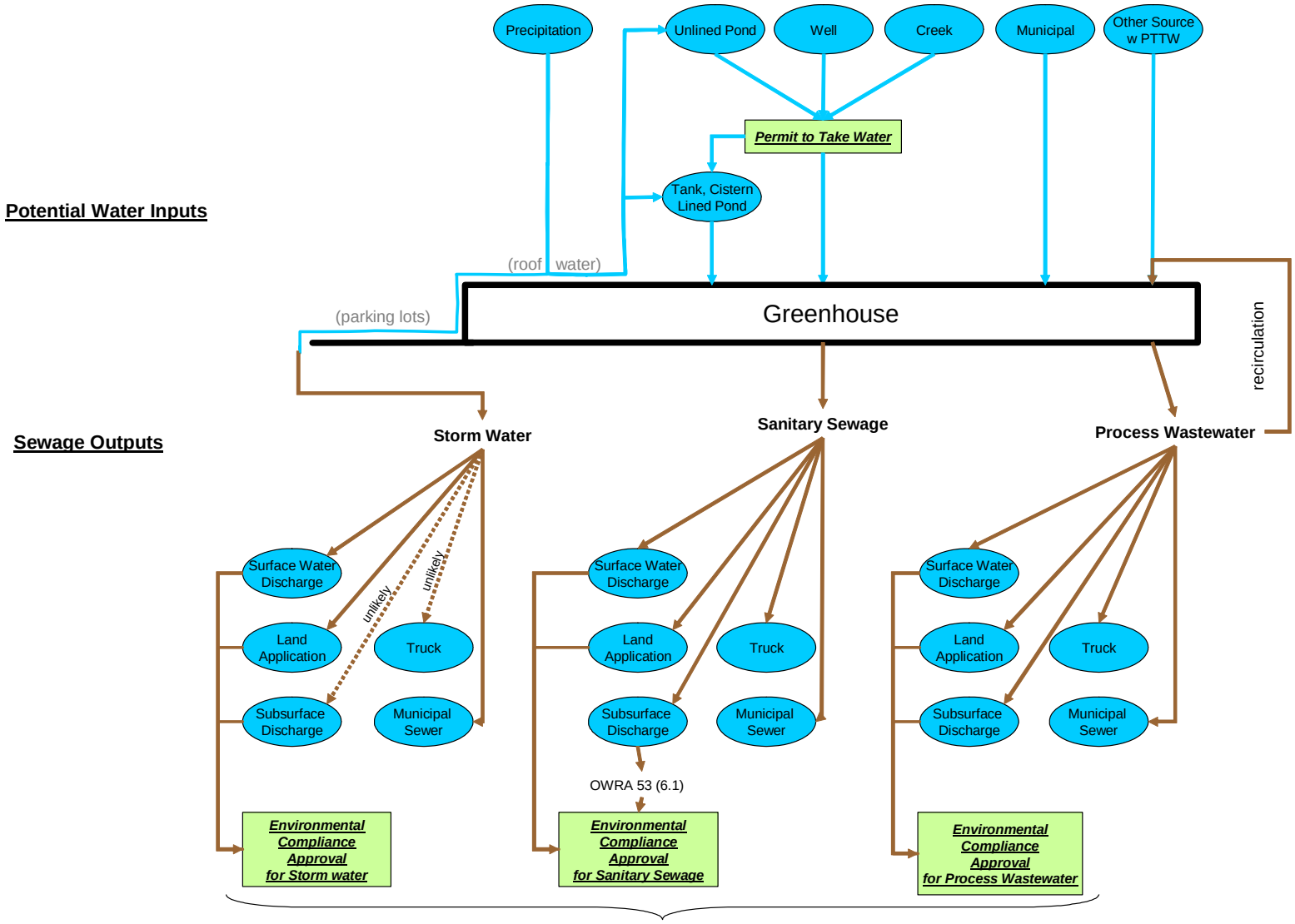
The ministry issues Environmental Compliance Approvals that permit various activities to proceed in compliance with the legislation. An Environmental Compliance Approval must be obtained before using, operating, establishing, altering, extending or replacing new or existing sewage works.

Depending on your greenhouse operation practices, you may require approval from the ministry for more than one activity. Under the new application process you may be able to apply for approval for multiple activities mentioned in the sewage works approval subsection 53(1) of the OWRA using a single application form. Examples of this new approach are detailed in the diagram below.

There are specific situations where a sewage works is exempted or excepted by legislation from the requirement to obtain a sewage works approval. If you think your sewage works may be exempted/excepted from this requirement please contact your local District Office of the Ministry of the Environment.

This diagram describes the approvals commonly required for greenhouse water management, including Environmental Compliance Approvals for wastewater.

Typical Greenhouse water inputs and waste outputs: Sources, Destinations and Required MOE Approvals



Updated October 19, 2011

How do I get an Environmental Compliance Approval?

In general, the process for obtaining an Environmental Compliance Approval involves the following steps:

1. Pre-submission consultation:

- You are encouraged to review the application form, Introductory Guide to Applying for Environmental Compliance Approvals, the Guide for Applying for Sewage Works Approvals, and the ministry's Design Guidelines for Sewage Works to familiarize yourself with the application requirements and determine whether the services of a qualified consulting firm familiar with greenhouse processes and sewage works impacts and design will be required to help prepare supporting documentation for your approval application.

  Once this has been done, it is strongly recommended that you engage in pre-submission consultation with your local District Office of the Ministry of the Environment before submitting an application for an Environmental Compliance Approval. It is a good idea to have your consultant or engineer present during your pre-submission consultation since the discussion will include what kind supporting documentation or technical studies you will require. The application requirements will be clarified during the consultation, helping you avoid lengthy delays from any missing or incomplete information.

2. Completion of the application form:

- The application form, any required supporting documents, and the applicable application fee, are submitted to the ministry's Environmental Approvals Access and Service Integration Branch with a copy to your local District Office. Application forms and related guidance documents are available online, or may be obtained by contacting the ministry's Environment Environmental Approvals Access and Service Integration Branch:

  2 St. Clair Ave. W, Floor 12A
  Toronto ON M4V 1L5
  Telephone outside Toronto 1-800-461-6290 or in Toronto 416-314-8001
  Fax: 416-314-8452
  E-mail: eaabgen.moe@ontario.ca

3. Ministry evaluation:

- Your application and supporting documents are reviewed by ministry staff from your local District Office, the Regional office and finally by the Environmental Approvals Access and Service Integration Branch, taking into consideration any environmental impacts. Any concerns are addressed through the review process.

4. Approval issued:

- If your application is approved, an Environmental Compliance Approval is issued. The ministry may visit your greenhouse to inspect the operations included in your Environmental Compliance Approval.

How much does an Environmental Compliance Approval cost?

The application fee for an Environmental Compliance Approval depends on the type of application and the extent of technical review required. The electronic application you fill out will calculate the fee required. For further details, refer to the fact sheet Environmental Registration: Application Fees for Environmental Compliance Approvals available online at: http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@ene/@resources/documents/resource/stdprod_090981.pdf or contact the ministry's Environmental Approvals Access and Service Integration Branch.

What happens after I receive my Environmental Compliance Approval?

You have a number of legal responsibilities as the owner of a sewage works:

- Ensure you have an Environmental Compliance Approval before using, operating, establishing, altering, extending or replacing a new or existing sewage works.
- Ensure you are operating within the conditions of your approval.
- Apply for an amendment to your approval prior to altering, extending, or replacing any part of your sewage works.
- Renew your Environmental Compliance Approval before it expires (if applicable).
- Keep a copy of your approval on site.
- Contact your local District Office if you receive any complaints regarding your operation.

The ministry may visit your greenhouse, either to conduct a routine inspection of the operations included in your Environmental Compliance Approval, or in response to a complaint. Environmental Officer's may conduct announced or unannounced inspections.

Summary – Requirements of Greenhouse Operators

- ✓ Obtain an Environmental Compliance Approval and renew before it expires (if applicable)
- ✓ Operate within the conditions of your Environmental Compliance Approval.
- ✓ Apply for an amendment to your approval before making any changes to your sewage works.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, please visit the following ministry website links, or contact one of the offices listed below.

Environmental Protection Act and Ontario Water Resources Act
www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/index.html

Environmental Compliance Approval General Information
http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/industry/assessment_and_approvals/environmental_approvals/index.htm

Application form and Guide to Applying for and Environmental Compliance Approval
http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/resources/STD01_076023.html

Application Fees for Environmental Compliance Approvals
www.ene.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@ene/@resources/documents/resource/stdprod_090981.pdf

Guide for Applying For Approval of Sewage Works
http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/industry/assessment_and_approvals/environmental_approvals/STDPROD_080604.html

Design Guidelines for Sewage Works
http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/resources/STD01_076025.html

What to expect when an Environmental Officer Inspects Your Facility
http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/resources/STD01_076580.html

Building Code Act and Ontario Building Code Part 8
www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/index.html

To find your local District Office visit http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/ or contact one of the Regional Offices listed below.

Ministry of the Environment	
Central Region Office (North York) Tel. 416-326-6700 or 1-800-810-8048	**Northern Regional Office (Thunder Bay)** Tel. 807-475-1205 or 1-800-875-7772
Eastern Regional Office (Kingston) Tel: 613-549-4000 or 1-800-267-0974	**Southwestern Regional Office (London)** Tel. 519-873-5000 or 1-800-265-7672
West Central Regional Office (Hamilton) Tel: (905) 521-7640 or 1-800-668-4557	

This fact sheet is for information purposes. If there is a discrepancy between this fact sheet and the legislation, the legislation prevails.

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